

# Autism Spectrum Disorders – Vermont Special Education Eligibility, Ages 6-21

10-2002

**Determining eligibility for children or youth with an Autism Spectrum Disorder is the first step in designing effective and individualized special education interventions to support a student's access to a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE).**

## **Disability Determination**

### **Autism**

Only Vermont students with a diagnosis of "Autism" or "Autistic Disorder" from a medical doctor are served under the primary disability category of "Autism". All students who have this autism diagnosis should be identified under this category.

### **Other Health Impairment**

Vermont students with a diagnosis along the Autism Spectrum (PDD-NOS /Atypical Autism, Childhood Disintegrative Disorder, Rett Syndrome, and Asperger Syndrome) may be determined to have a primary disability of "Other Health Impairment (OHI)". The Evaluation and Planning Team (EPT) must obtain the opinion of a person whose professional licensure authorizes him or her to offer an opinion on the existence of the condition and who has specific training and experience in diagnosing and recommending treatment. OHI is an appropriate disability category for students who demonstrate "limited strength, vitality or alertness, including a heightened awareness to environmental stimuli..."

### **Emotional Disturbance**

Students with a diagnosis along the Autism Spectrum are not eligible for special education under the disability category "Emotional Disturbance (ED)". Students with autism or another ASD are excluded from this category because their inability to learn can be explained by sensory or health factors.

## **Adverse Effect**

In order to be eligible for special education, an adverse effect in one of the basic skill areas must be documented. Basic skill areas include:

- Oral expression\*
- Listening comprehension\*
- Written expression
- Basic reading skills
- Reading comprehension\*
- Mathematics calculation
- Mathematics reasoning
- Motor skills\*

Core deficits for children with ASD include difficulty with communication, social interactions and behavior. Often adverse effect can most easily be documented in the basic skill areas identified above with an asterisk (\*).

## **Adverse Effect Continued:**

Between 60 & 70% of students with ASD have some level of learning impairment. Students with ASD who have average to above average intelligence may demonstrate adverse effect within a basic skill area, regardless of their IQ score.

For all adverse effect measures, a student must have documented performance levels determined to be among the lowest 15% compared to average performing grade level peers **or** have a standard score that is at least 1 standard deviation below the mean on a norm-referenced test. Each basic skill area used to demonstrate adverse effect must be documented separately using at least 3 different measures. The EPT must demonstrate that adverse effect has been present for at least six months.

## **Need**

Vermont students eligible for special education must be in need of specially designed instruction that cannot be provided within the school's standard instructional conditions or through the school's educational support system. Specially designed instruction is necessary to address the learning needs of most students with an autism spectrum disorder.

Along the entire Autism Spectrum, students have significant difficulty processing information and generalizing learned skills to different environments. A key feature of these students' learning profiles is that they are primarily "visual learners". Information that is presented in a static, visual format allows the child with an ASD to focus on the important features of the intended communication and better receive the message or direction. Use of visual supports to pre-teach concepts and activities, as well as repeated opportunities to practice learned skills in a variety of environments, are important components of specially designed instruction for learners with ASD.

## **504 Eligibility**

A child diagnosed with autism or other ASD who is not eligible for special education may need specific accommodations (504 plan) as part of his/her educational plan.